



DECISION MEMO

Pierce Powderhouse



USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forests
North Fork Ranger District
Clearwater County, Idaho

Background

The project area has a high proportion of root disease prone Douglas-fir (>50% in many areas) and grand fir. Tree mortality from root disease and insect infestation is expected to increase due to the prevalence of Armillaria root disease, Heterobasidion (*annosus*) root disease, yellow rot root disease, Indian paint fungus and Douglas-fir beetle and fir engraver beetle in the project area. Forest Health Protection surveys confirmed the current and potential risk of mortality from insect & disease. The “Pierce Powderhouse Forest Health Evaluation” report, available in the project record, documents the existing occurrence of insect & disease throughout the project area.

The current level of infection and mortality in the project area is considered high enough to require a regeneration harvest. Intermediate harvest such as commercial thinning which leaves susceptible trees onsite would prolong the current issues of root disease, Indian paint fungus and insect infestation, lead to the mortality of the retained Douglas-fir and grand fir, and allow the regeneration of shade tolerant susceptible species, i.e. Douglas-fir and grand fir, thus continuing the cycle.

The most widely used and successful approach for managing root disease infected areas is shifting forest species composition to favor species more tolerant and resistant to root disease, such western white pine, western larch, spruce, red cedar and hemlock. Healthy western white pine and western larch, as well as scattered red cedar and spruce, occur in sufficient quantities (5-20 trees/acre) to provide for some natural regeneration of tolerant species, especially white pine that likely has a natural resistance to white pine blister rust. Interplanting western white pine and western larch in the harvested area will ensure adequate stocking of desired species in the area. Some natural regeneration of susceptible species is expected from residual seed sources.

The purpose and need for the Pierce Powderhouse project is to:

- Improve forest health and stand resilience to insects and disease by increasing stand species diversity and promoting species which are more tolerant to root diseases.
- Promote restoration of western white pine with blister rust resistance through both natural regeneration and planting of rust resistant seedlings.
- Provide for social and economic benefits through timber harvest on lands identified as Management Area E-1 (productive timber land).

Decision

I have decided to approve the Pierce Powderhouse project located on the North Fork Ranger District in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests, Idaho County, Idaho at Township 37 North, Range 5 East, Section 27 Boise Meridian (see attached maps). The project will use commercial timber harvest and reforestation to restore species and structural diversity in order to reduce the incidence and perpetuation of root disease and insect infestation in the affected stands. No permanent road construction would occur in this project. As the harvest unit (138 acres) will exceed 40 acres, a request to exceed the 40-acre opening limitation was submitted to the Regional Forester on April 26, 2018. Regional Forester approval was provided on May 7, 2018. The approval letter is available in the project record.

The following activities will be implemented:

- Approximately 138 acres of two-aged regeneration harvest (seed-tree with reserves) using skyline and/or ground based logging systems.
- Construct 0.5 miles of temporary roads to facilitate access for commercial harvest. Temporary roads will be decommissioned after the project is completed.
- Stabilize segments of Forest Service Roads 5191-A and 5194, where and as necessary.
- Road maintenance activities along the haul route, and, where necessary, reconstruction will include culvert replacements, spot rock replacements, brushing, and reshaping drainage dips.
- Activity-generated fuels (slash) resulting from timber harvest will be treated mechanically or through prescribed fire as site preparation in advance of reforestation.
- Reforest harvest areas with early seral species such as western white pine and western larch.
- Rehabilitate and revegetate disturbed soils as needed to restore soil function and productivity.

The following project design features are not all-inclusive, Forest Plan Standards are incorporated by reference:

SOIL RESOURCES	
SR-1	Restrict activities when soils are wet to prevent resource damage (indicators include excessive rutting, soil displacement, and erosion).
SR-2	Limit ground based skidding to slopes 45% or less (Idaho Forest Practices Act).
SR-3	Locate and design skid trails, landings and yarding corridors prior to activities to minimize the area of detrimental soil effects. Space tractor skid trails no less than 80 feet apart (edge to edge), except where converging on landings. This does not preclude the use of feller bunchers.
SR-4	Restrict equipment used for post-harvest excavator piling to existing trails and/or previously impacted areas.
SR-5	Ensure suspension of one end of the log when utilizing skyline yarding systems.
SR-6	Construct drainage controls (waterbars, drain ditches) and apply available slash in log yarding corridors (cable or skyline) upon completion of harvest activities where bare mineral soil is exposed and water flow may be confined.
SR-7	Scarify and recontour excavated skid trails to restore slope hydrology and soil productivity.
SR-9	All temporary roads will be scarified and recontoured (decommissioned). Reshape cut/fill slopes and crossings to natural contours. Apply available slash to the recontour surface (slash is considered available where the equipment is able to reach it from the working area where the decommissioning is occurring).
SR-12	Allow winter logging only during frozen conditions,. Frozen conditions are defined as 4 inches of frozen ground or a barrier of unpacked snow greater than two feet in depth and packed snow one foot in depth.
SR-14	Retain an average of x to x tons per acre of coarse woody debris (greater than 3 inches in diameter) following completion of activities.
WATER QUALITY AND FISH HABITAT	
WQ-2	Avoid direct ignition of fuels within RHCA's. Allow prescribed fires to back into these areas.

WILDLIFE	
WL-2	Where possible commensurate with operations, retain trees with obvious cavities or large stick nests. Also where possible retain Pacific Yew for Moose for winter range habitat.
AIR QUALITY	
AQ-1	Limit burning to times when wind patterns would cause smoke plumes to drift away from local populated areas.
AQ-2	Coordinate with the Idaho/Montana Airshed Group when prescribed burns are scheduled (minimum 24 hour notice) to ensure compliance with the Clean Air Act.
ARCHEOLOGICAL AND HISTORIC	
AR-1	Known historic (NRHP Eligible/historically significant) properties or sites will be avoided or protected during project implementation. Ground-disturbing activities would be halted if cultural resources are discovered until an Archaeologist can properly evaluate and document the resources in compliance with 36 CFR 800 (mandatory contract provision B6.24).
FISHERIES	
FF-1	INFISH Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) would be adhered to in all units.
NOXIOUS WEEDS	
NW-1	Use Forest Service approved native plant species or non-native annual species to meet erosion control needs and other management objectives. Follow regional plant and seed transfer guidelines. Require contractors to use certified seed laboratories to test seed against the all state noxious weed list, and provide documentation of the seed inspection test to the contract administrator. Apply only certified weed-free seed and mulch.
NW-3	Remove all mud, soil, and plant parts from off road equipment before moving into project area to limit the spread of noxious weeds. Conduct cleaning off National Forest lands.
NW-4	Use rock from Forest Service approved sources.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The categories of actions are identified in agency procedures as:

- 36 CFR220.6(e)(5): Regeneration of an area to native tree species, including site preparation that does not involve the use of herbicides or result in vegetation type conversion.
- 36 CFR 220.6(e)(14): Commercial and non-commercial sanitation harvest of trees to control insects or disease not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction, including removal of infested/infected trees and adjacent live uninfested/uninfected trees as determined necessary to control the spread of insects or disease. The proposed action may include incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing.

These categories are applicable for (1) treating areas experiencing substantial insect and disease impacts, (2) reforesting the harvest areas with native, more disease resistant species, and (3) improving stand diversity.

Based on the findings for resource conditions described below, I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances are associated with my decision. Forest Service direction at 36 CFR 220.6(b) describes the resource conditions that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstance related to the proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an EIS or EA.

- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat or Forest Service sensitive species – The Forest Interdisciplinary (ID) Team Wildlife Biologist, Fisheries Biologist and Botanist have determined the project would have no significant effects to federally list and R1 Sensitive wildlife, fish and

plant species and/or their habitats. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified for these resources.

- Floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds – The Forest Hydrologist determined no floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds are present in the project area, and therefore no significant effects to are expected to these resources. The project is consistent with all applicable State and Federal water quality laws, and with soil and water standards in the Nez Perce National Forest Plan. Based on this analysis, no extraordinary circumstances were identified regarding floodplains, wetlands, and municipal watersheds.
- Congressionally designated areas, such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas or National Recreation Areas – The project area is not located in any congressionally designated area, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.
- Inventoried Roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – The project area is not located in an Inventoried Roadless Area, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to this resource.
- Research Natural Areas – The project area is not located in a Research Natural Area, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to this resource.
- American Indians and Alaska native religious or cultural sites – A cultural resource records search has been conducted for this project. Based on the project description a “*No Adverse Effect Determination*” has been made for this project per the North Idaho Cultural Resource Programmatic Agreement. As a result, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to native religious or cultural sites.
- Archaeological sites or historical properties or areas – The Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer, or the Forest Archaeologist via the use of the North Idaho Programmatic Agreement has determined that no archaeological or historic property will be adversely affected by this project. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

Public Involvement

On October 16, 2017, the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests mailed letters to individuals, organizations, state and local agencies, and the Nez Perce Tribe, providing information and seeking public comment. Project information was also made available at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/nezperce> under NEPA projects. A legal notice appeared in the *Lewiston Tribune* on October 24, 2017, inviting comments for 14 days from publication. Two responses were received regarding this project during the public comment period. None of the comments received identified the presence of or information relating to any extraordinary circumstances.

Findings Required by other Laws

Based on my review of the actions associated with this project, I find that the Pierce Powderhouse Project is consistent with applicable Federal, state and local laws and regulations, including management area direction and the standards and guidelines contained in the 1987 Clearwater National Forest Plan, as amended, as required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976.

Administrative Review (Appeal) Opportunities

This project is not subject to Administrative Review.

Implementation Date

The project will begin in the fall/winter of 2019-2020.

Contact

Questions regarding this decision should be sent to Johanna Kovarik, North Zone NEPA Team Lead, North Fork Ranger District, 12730 US Hwy 12, Orofino, ID 83544 or by telephone at (208) 476-4541 or FAX at (208) 476-8329 during business hours (M-F, excluding Federal holidays, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., PST).



ANDREW SKOWLUND
District Ranger
North Fork Ranger District



Date

cc: Johanna Kovarik, Lois Hill

Attachment: Map

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Map. Pierce Powderhouse Project

